



# The Conference Workshop: Inservice Considerations for Professional Educators

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The annual conference is used by members of many professional groups to exchange information and to explore new avenues of endeavor. A frequently used format of information exchange and skill development is the conference workshop. Typically, in this setting, a group of individuals prepares a program of events, both didactic and performance based, which results in the participants leaving with a new set of professional skills and knowledge. Little empirical data exist to document the effectiveness of the conference workshop in teaching colleague professionals new skills or knowledge.

### Workshop Design

A workshop on competency based instructional formats was developed for presentation at an annual international conference of special education personnel (Berdine et al., 1976). The workshop had two general objectives: (a) to teach participants how to write three formats of competency based instruction that were designed for use in competency based teacher education training programs, and (b) to determine the effectiveness of the workshop evaluation system developed to monitor the accomplishment of the first objective.

The first objective of the workshop was approached through three 45 minute modules of

instruction. The workshop modules covered the following:

1. Mediated Instructional Formats: using a videotaped format and programed narrative.
2. Autoinstructional Format (published text or material): a self pacing module using a journal article for textual context.
3. Autoinstructional Format (programed narrative): a self pacing module using a professor written, programed narrative.

A fourth module of instruction, Mastery Session, was also offered to those workshop participants with extensive experience in competency based teacher education module development, but who were interested in a more global look at competency based teacher education and particularly the assessment of mastery in competency based instructional activities. Following the 90 minute Mastery Session, participants could elect to involve themselves in one of the other three modules. Upon completion of a short introductory session on competency based teacher education and an orientation to the four module offerings, the workshop participants were permitted to select either the three content modules or the Mastery module and one content module. The modules were offered on a rotating basis to facilitate this selection process. A total of 65 persons participated in the workshop.

### Workshop Evaluation

A series of evaluation instruments were designed to determine participant perceived im-

pact of each format presented in the workshop. This was done both formatively (between session) to make any immediate changes in the workshop and summatively (postsession) to systematically identify any deficit areas within any of the formats. The system has direct application to any workshop adhering to a design using prespecified objectives and expected exiting participant competencies.

No attempt was made to pretest the workshop participants across the competencies of the instructional formats, since the evaluation was not aimed toward testing for significant differences in effectiveness among the module formats, but rather to assess the viability of the workshop evaluative system. This minimizes any concern about the internal validity of the instrumentation (Campbell & Stanley, 1966).

### Data Analysis

The following two research questions were being asked concerning the data collected from the Between Session and Postsession Questionnaires and Observation of Attending sampling:

1. For each Between Session and Postsession Questionnaire item, were there significant differences in the proportions of +3 responses (highest degree of adequacy) as compared to all other responses (+3, +2, +1, -1, -2, -3), as a function of presentation format?
2. Did percentages of on-task behavior (attending to Session Presenter) vary relative to Format of Presentation and Time Slot of Presentation?

### Results: Research Question #1

The proportions of +3 responses to each format and to the workshop in general were tabulated across questionnaire items. Confidence intervals, within which the proportions of +3 responses would be expected to fall 95% of the time, were then constructed (Glass & Stanley, 1970). For each item, the criterion for a significant difference among the formats, or between format(s) and the overall workshop, was non-overlap (to the nearest thousandth) among the particular corresponding confidence intervals.

The only significant difference obtained was between the Programed Narrative Format (Format III) and the Mastery Format (Format IV).

With regard to their respective content being appropriate for meeting stated objectives (Between Session Questionnaire, Item #3), the Programed Narrative Format elicited a significantly higher proportion of +3 responses (.81,  $p < .05$ ) than did the Mastery Format (.27). The data analysis additionally yielded a trend toward significant differences between the Mastery Format and the overall (Postsession) ratings.

### Results: Research Question #2

A response surface technique was used to depict data concerning the workshop participants' attending behavior during each of the instructional format modules. Participant Attending data were collected in percentage form and analyzed using a regression model (Myers, 1971) for Module Format (Y) versus Time Slot (X).

To illustrate the results, a response surface was constructed via computer. The graph indicated that attention peaks (> 99.9%) were obtained both very early in the workshop and very late. With the exception of the mediated format, modules presented during the second session seemed to elicit less attention from participants than modules presented during the first and third sessions. In addition, percentage of on-task behavior generally seemed to be a function of both format and time slot, rather than either format or time slot alone.

Of further interest, a factor analysis performed on the two sets of between session responses revealed a strong internal consistency suggesting that this questionnaire was very successful in getting the information for which it was intended. Rummel (1970) gives conventional acceptance of a factor as identifying a construct when the first factor accounts for  $\geq 70\%$  of total variation (ours accounted for 84.7), and all factor loadings on the factor were .40 and within .30 of each other. The minimum loading was .79 with a range of .18, thus giving much stronger evidence than conventional requirements of single construct consistency in the responses to the questionnaire.

### Conclusions and Implications

The data from the observation of attending indicate that participants were attending at a higher rate during the first module session in the Mediated module than they were in the

other three formats. A similar high rate of attending was found in the final module sessions with the Programed Narrative module. This data may indicate a preference of participants in the workshop for a novel format of presentation, such as videotape combined with little active involvement, in early sessions of a workshop and active programed involvement toward the end of a workshop. The former perhaps allows the participants to become accustomed to the workshop setting and requirements. The latter facilitates their continued involvement as well as expediting the conclusion of the workshop.

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